



Gretna Good News

Mt. Gretna Bible Festival News

Fall 2016

Summer at the Tabernacle 2016

Looking back over the twenty two programs that made up the 2016 Summer at the Tabernacle the impression that develops is that of variety. We have done a good deal of “looking back” lately in preparation for the celebrations being planned for the anniversary year of 2017 – 125 years of continuous services of worship and praise “in the grove,” and a good many other things as well, weddings, funerals, music, meditations, spiritual help and healing, picnics, and community celebrations.

As readers of this Newsletter are well aware, all this has happened not in any planned sequence but as a result of the impact of changing social conditions on some non-changing foundations. The first campmeeting season in Gretna featured long sermons by the bishops of the denomination, delivered from a preacher’s stand located approximately where the center of the Tabernacle “stage” is today. There was a music director (John Lehman, the mathematics and astronomy professor at Lebanon Valley College) and he probably organized a camp choir, although there are no records indicating anything that he actually did. But there was always a music director, and when they found one they liked they tried to keep him year after year. (This characteristic became very obvious later in life in the persons of Earl Miller, Francis Williamson, and especially Alden Biely, whose intermittent association with the Campmeeting spans forty years ending in 1992.

Fortunately, the planners who created the exciting and well-attended programs for this year’s Bible Festival considered the fact that active political campaigning all summer long would be assaulting our ears and testing our patience. Consequently, they provided not only relief from its constant personal warfare but, in contrast, joyful presentations in a variety of musical and spoken formats. How reassuring to hear harmonies instead of discord, and ideas expressed in words that did not need “clarification” (or even denial) the next day.

For starters, the Tabernacle Ecumenical Worship Services provided an opportunity for neighbors to come together on Friday evenings in June to worship and learn. (See TEPS>TEWS on page 4 of this issue.) And what better follow-up could there be than the

Mennonite Children’s Choir – clear young voices singing their praises with sincerity and discipline? Or the gentle the spiritual jazz of the Andy Roberts Four Piece Quartet giving us their own original modern harmonies on tunes that were familiar when the Tabernacle was built?

Music was certainly the mainstay of this summer’s program – music in many varieties, ranging from solo piano to a full symphonic band, along with the enthusiasm and passion of the King’s Brass. The Bible Festival planners make a special effort to provide a varied musical fare and to bring new voices to the Tabernacle, such as Pastor Dave Allen from Calvary Church and Michael Faircloth from the National Christian Choir. The Keystone State Quartet provided an evening of gospel music; familiar friends Darell Woomer and Rodney Shearer led an old-fashioned hymn sing, and newcomer Patti Drennan conducted the volunteer Massed Choir in a stellar performance interspersed with her sparkling piano interludes. But most of you were in attendance and already know all this – the point in reminding you about it is to emphasize the variety and the quality of the Summer at the Tabernacle programs.

There is often a little something extra put into these programs by the performers, perhaps in response to audience appreciation or perhaps in response the spirit of the Tabernacle itself. There are many stories about that, and a new one unfolded right in front of those folks in the audience for the QuintEssentially Brass concert who happened to keep their eyes fixed on the platform during intermission. They were treated to an unusual sight that goes a long way to explaining why that group has been closing out the summer season for us ever since 1993. During the break, the stage was invaded by two schoolgirls, who had been paying very close attention to the music. They got to Kristen Albert before she left the platform and plied her with questions about how she makes that curlycue of brass (her French horn) produce such wonderful sounds. One little girl looking inside the horn and the other one listening intently was surely a teachable moment, and Kristen couldn’t let it pass. So we thank her for that and the whole gang for giving us something of value plus their great music.

Choral Music

Those readers who have followed the long run of Massed Choir concerts are well aware of the recent innovation that aligned the Choir’s concert schedule with the choral directors’ workshops sponsored by Loser’s Music Store in Lebanon. The resultant Tabernacle appearances of such well-known church music composers and teachers as Joe Martin, Lloyd Larsen, and Patti Drennan have made seats in the Choir as eagerly sought after as a spot on a Tabernacle bench. (Occupying a bench in the Tabernacle for the concert also entails a very early arrival on the Campmeeting grounds.)

These Massed Choir concerts have a long history – not quite as long as that of the Campmeeting itself, but beginning at least as early as 1956, when Earl Miller, a member of the music faculty at Messiah College, was first invited to attend camp as the music director. How many of our readers remember Earl? We’d really like to hear from you about him or about any other Massed Choir memories you may have. Next year’s concert will mark the 125th anniversary of the Campmeeting’s establishment at Mt. Gretna, and

great things are being planned for that celebration. (The Campmeeting Association itself is probably fifteen or twenty years older and was originally known as the Stoverdale Memorial Campmeeting Association. We don’t know what choral music was performed there, nor do we know very much else about those pre-Gretna days.) We’ll have more to say about the early Massed Choirs in the Spring 2017 issue of Gretna’s Good News.

The long run (since 1994) of the Susquehanna Chorale’s appearances in the Tabernacle and the enthusiastic crowds attending them speak volumes about the place of choral singing in the programming for each season’s Bible Festival. Recent appearances of the National Christian Choir reinforce that response to choral groups as did this summer’s response to the Mennonite Children’s Choir. It is a hallmark of Bible Festival planning that not only are the historic Anabaptist roots of our United Brethren heritage remembered, but our ecumenical outreach to the modern culture in which we are immersed is also celebrated – think King’s Brass and Dave Stahl.

The Tabernacle in Winter

Activity around the Tabernacle has not ceased even though the last word has been spoken and the last note played. No sooner had the performers left than the workers moved in. It has been apparent for some time that parts of the 118 year old structure were badly in need of repair and the modern conveniences (such as rest rooms) needed improving. And this year, the time has come. After a careful survey of needs and evaluation of bids, a contractor was selected and renovating and improving is well under way. The contributions you have been making to the Tabernacle fund are used for this purpose, so each of you may truly feel that your contribution is making these improvements possible. Physical maintenance, of

course, is an on-going process, and the treasurer’s report this year concluded with the following reminder, “Increased generosity in your donations to the fund for Preservation and Maintenance of the Tabernacle will be greatly appreciated.” We want to be ready for future needs.

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Selecting which of many causes you will support with monetary contributions is sometimes a difficult choice – so many possibilities for limited resources. Recognition of the historic significance and integrity of the Campmeeting by the National Park Service assures you that its preservation and continued use are worthy goals, and your continued (and increased) support is essential and very much appreciated.

Some Special Thoughts

Something special happened this year when **Chiques United Methodist Church** showed their support for our program by budgeting \$250 for the Bible Festival! Thank you, Chiques for being the first to do so and showing the way to other churches.

A number of individuals and organizations have assisted with the costs of designated programs through the Sponsor Program, which allows you to earmark your contribution to be used to pay the cost or a portion of the cost of a specific program. Your support will be acknowledged in the program bulletin or during the introduction if no bulletin is required. In addition to Chiques UMC, we especially want to thank and acknowledge the assistance of the following Sponsors for 2016:

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Every level of support is important to us. Many of the names in the following list of Partners in Ministry are familiar from their years of support. There are some new names, and we welcome them sincerely as we continue to provide opportunities for Christian worship in a unique Victorian setting.

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TEPS > TEWS

One of the newest programs under the Tabernacle umbrella is the Tabernacle Ecumenical Worship Services, formerly known as the Tabernacle Ecumenical Program. It is important to note that what began as an experiment in providing a worship period at a time more convenient than Sunday morning for the stressed-out members of the “post-modern” culture has been well received. The very positive response to the initial offerings and the increasing attendance at the Tabernacle on Friday evenings in June suggested that changing the name from the nondescript “Program” to the specific “Worship Service” would more accurately describe the purpose of what was being attempted.

A fundamental starting point for the experiment was the notion that while various denominations each have their own style of worshipping God, they are all approaching the same God. So, in the interests of harmony and peaceful side-by-side existence, why not listen to the different styles in which the same God may be considered and worshipped? In 2016 the notion of God’s Love was considered by four different pastors from four different Protestant denominations. Worshippers who attended all four services certainly

were left with the conviction that there are many facets of God’s Love, which is available to everyone.

The plan for 2017, perhaps in honor of the anniversary year or perhaps in response to the calendar’s provision of five Friday nights in June, is a little more ambitious. Of course, there will be five services, and the ecumenical spread is wider. “God Challenges” has been selected as the theme for next summer, and it will be addressed by Jewish, Episcopal, Mennonite, Seventh Day Adventist, and Evangelical Congregational clergy. This should create very interesting Friday nights next June. Further details will be given in the Spring newsletter.

2017 - Our 125th Anniversary



**SUMMER 2017
ECUMENICAL THEME**

“God’s Challenges”

Mt. Gretna Campmeeting